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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study was an analysis of the differential influence socioeconomic status and "significant others" have on the educational aspirations of black and white youth. A causal model was developed from related theoretical and empirical research and was analyzed by path analytic techniques. The models revealed that the independent influence of significant others on educational aspirations is relatively stronger for the white respondents in the sample of more than 300 Southern high school adolescents. These and other findings suggest that significant others influence is not an important predictor of black youth's educational goals. The findings of this study also have various theoretical and methodological implications. It was noted that the model analyzed in this study omits many important variables which could be included with appropriate theoretical justifications. Attempts at developing more complex non-recursive models utilizing these data are currently underway and it was suggested that further research be conducted in this area. (Author/BW)

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THE ROLE OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND SIGNIFICANT OTHER INFLUENCE IN DETERMINING EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS: A BLACK-WHITE COMPARISON OF SOUTHERN HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS*

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Introduction

The large amount of research compiled recently in the general area of social stratification on the educational aspiration and attainment processes suggests that the socioeconomic status position of the nuclear family is positively related to adolescents' educational orientations.[1] Numerous studies, over time and across cultures, have provided empirical evidence which validates this proposition for occupational as well as educational aspirations (Kahl, 1953; Sewell, Haller and Strauss, 1957; Floud, Halsey and Martin, 1954; Pavalko and Bishop, 1966; Kandel and Lesser, 1969; Rehberg, Schafer and Sinclair, 1969; Picou and Cosby, 1971). The basis for social class variations in educational achievement orientations has been interpreted in terms of differences in parental discipline techniques and family authority structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Elder, 1965). Most recently, Kohn (1969) has demonstrated that basic class variations in values are related to polar orientations of conformity and self-direction. Lower class parents tend to stress work values, etc. that are conforming to external standards, while upper class parents

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[1] Researchers in this area have noted that there exists more than one dimension for educational orientations. Ohlendorf and Kuvlesky (1968) and Rehberg (1967), among others, have utilized a two-dimensional approach, which makes a basic distinction between educational aspirations (desired goals) and educational expectations (anticipated occurances). A three dimensional approach to occupational and educational orientations has also been utilized (Picou, Curry and Olivero, 1972 and Picou, 1972). The three dimensional approach delineates between: (1) ideal aspirations; (2) intended aspirations and (3) expectations.

tend to emphasize values which promote self-direction.[2]

Numerous empirical studies have also revealed that socioeconomic status is positively related to the amount of encouragement students' perceive from "significant others" to attend college (Bordua, 1960; Haller and Butterworth, 1960; and Sewell, et al., 1970). With regard to this relationship, Sewell, et al., state:

> ...the higher a person's socio-economic status, the higher will be the socio-economic status of those with whom he interacts and the more likely he will be to expect from them behavior signaling higher socioeconomic status (Sewell, et al., 1970: 1015).[3]

For adolescents, it is apparent that peer groups provide influence for the development of career orientations (Duncan, et al., 1968). Bordua (1960) provides evidence which indicates that the relationship between socioeconomic status and educational projections of youth are mediated by parental expectations for college enrollment. Recently, the work of Sewell and his associates reveals that significant other influence is an important predictor of educational and occupational aspirations, as well as early educational achievement (For a summary of these findings, see: Sewell, 1971).

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[2] Prior to Kohn's contribution concerning class-based variations in value orientations, researchers in this area usually were divided into two basic theoretical groups - "Common value theme" versus "class-based value theme". The writings of Merton (1961) and Cloward and Ohlin (1960) reflect the "common value themes," while the writings of Hyman (1963) and Hollingshead (1949) represent the class-based value theme. For more information and clarification of these approaches see: Empey (1956), Han (1969) and Rehberg (1967).

[3] Current researchers generally employ the concept "significant others" to connote those individuals who exert a major influence on the individuals' social self. For more information on the usuage of this concept, see: Stryker, 1967.

Related Research on Black Youth

Empirical research on the educational aspirations of black youth indicate that, in contrast to whites, black adolescents generally have higher level educational goals and plans (Gist and Bennett, 1963; Smith and Abramson, 1962; Hindelang, 1971). Studies by Antonovosky and Lerner (1959) and Reiss and Rhodes (1959) have also provided findings which indicates that black youth view education as being important for occupational achievement moreso than their white counterparts. Although numerous studies have attempted to determine the relationship of various nonintellective factors to achievement orientations of black youth, relatively few investigations have been specifically concerned with role of significant other influence in determining educational aspirations.[4] Gordon's (1971) recent study indicates that for both black and white youth that social class influences parents aspirations for children and, in turn, both of these variables influence educational aspirations. However, slightly weaker relationships were found for the black respondents.

Additionally, research conducted by Hollister (1969) and Harris (1970) reveal some support for the contention that black parents provide more interpersonal encouragement for college attendance, have higher level educational aspirations for their children and are more concerned

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[4] Gurin (1970) found that academic self-confidence and sense of personal control were related to black college students' occupational aspirations. Cosby and Picou (1971) have also demonstrated that residence and, to a lesser degree, socioeconomic status are significantly related to deep-South black high school youths' occupational aspirations.

about their childrens' educational future, than white parents.

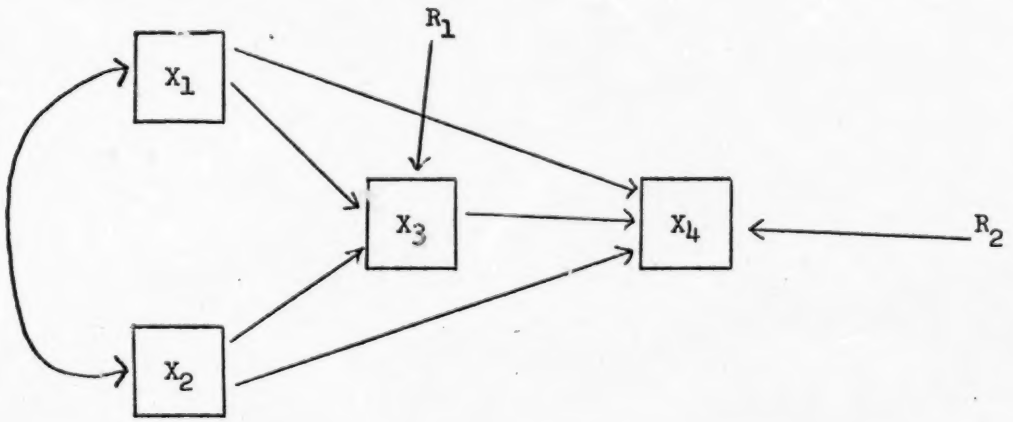
This brief review of relevant theoretical and empirical research in this area suggest the following hypotheses:

H_1: Socioeconomic status is positively related to level of educational aspiration.

H_2: Socioeconomic status is positively related to the amount of interpersonal encouragement to attend college provided by significant others.

H_3: The amount of interpersonal encouragement to attend college provided by significant others is positively related to level of educational aspiration.

These hypotheses suggest a causal model which has socioeconomic status determining significant other influence and, in turn, these two variables both determining adolescents' educational aspirations. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the model which will be analyzed by separate residence-race-sex control groups.



X_1 = Father's occupation

X_2 = Father's education

X_3 = Significant other influence

X_4 = Educational aspirations

Figure 1. Causal Model Relating Variables Included in This Study.

Methodology

The sample. A proportionate, stratified, random cluster sample of Louisiana high school seniors was selected in November of 1970, yielding a total N of 3,245 respondents. High schools within the state were stratified on the basis of residence (rural-urban), school type (public-parochial) and school size (large-medium-small). The census classification of rural and urban was employed to differentiate between residence categories. Schools which had an enrollment of 500 or more pupils were considered as "large", [illegible], while schools with 100 pupils or less were considered small. Questionnaires were administered to all seniors present the day group interviews were scheduled.

Operationalization of Variables. Two indicators of socioeconomic status were utilized. Father's occupation (X_1) was determined by assigning metric transformations of Duncan's socio-economic scores to NORC prestige scores for the job that respondents indicated their fathers currently held (Duncan, 1961). In the event that the respondents' fathers were currently unemployed or deceased, the last job held by the father was obtained. Father's education (X_2) was determined by responses to an item on the questionnaire which asked the students to indicate, from an exhaustive rank ordered list of years of school completed, how much education their fathers attained.

Significant other influence (X_3). This variable was determined by a weighted combination of three items which measured the perceived encouragement of parents, teachers and friends for enrolling in college. The principal component method of factor analysis was employed to determine

item weights. Normalized weighted scores were generated having a zero point and a $\bar{X}$ of 10 by linear transformations of the summation of the factor weighted standard scores for each item for each respondent (Azuma, 1971).

The dependent variable in this study - educational aspirations (X_4) was operationalized from responses to the following question:

> "How much education do you desire and will actively attempt to get?"[5]

A fixed-choice answer sheet was provided on the questionnaire which ranged from response alternatives "twelfth grade" to "obtain a Ph.D. or M.D.. These values ranged from 13 to 18 in numerical values.

Statistical Analysis. Causal model analysis has witnessed a recent increase in usage among social scientists. Four basic techniques currently exist for developing and analyzing a causal model: (1) Lazarsfeld-Hyman; (2) Simon-Blalock; (3) Path Analysis; and (4) simultaneous equations (Yetley, 1969). Path analytic techniques will be utilized in this study.

In the development of a recursive model, that is, a model which contains no feedback, estimations of the causal paths are a special case of multiple regression analysis (Goldberger, 1970). The calculated path coefficient measures the percentage of change in the dependent variables's standard deviation that would result from a change of one

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[5] It should be noted that this operationalization not only considers the youth's desires or orientation toward a goal, but also includes his intentions for the future. In contrast to previous projection studies, intended educational aspirations are being investigated in this research. For more information, see: Picou, 1972 and Picou, Curry and Olivero, 1972.

standard deviation in the independent variable, holding all other extraneous (residual) variables constant (Land, 1969: 8-9). The square of the path coefficient measures "th proportion of the variance of the dependent variable for which the determining variable is directly responsible (Land, 1969: 10; Wright, 1934: 164). Essentially, path coefficients are standarized partial regression coefficients. The basic theorem of path analysis can be summarized in the following formula:

$$r_{ij} = \sum_{q} P_{iq} \quad r_{qj},$$

where:

i and j being two variables in the model

q includes all other endogenous variables

The following assumptions also hold for path analysis: (A) there is only one-way causal relationships between variables; (B) all variables are in standard form; (C) all relationships between variables are linear and additive; (D) disturbance variables are not intercorrelated.

The path models developed and analyzed in this study should be viewed as aids to interpretation. Causal relationships are not specifically proven with path analysis. However, path analysis does allow one to note the implausibility of theoretical arguments by revealing contradictory empirical results.[6]

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[6] For further, more detailed explications of path analysis, the reader should consult: Duncan (1966); Land (1969); Heiss (1969); Boyle (1970); Nygreen (1970); Lyons and Carter (1971) and Carter and Carter (1971).

Findings

The results of the analysis will be presented in the following manner: first, the gross interrelationships of the variables will be presented in the form of zero-order correlations; second, the independent effects of the causally related variables will be presented in terms of path coefficients in tabular form.

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlations between the variables by various control categories. In general, stronger correlation coefficients obtained for both urban black and white respondents, in contrast to their rural counterparts. The strongest correlations found were for the urban white respondents, while the weakest correlations between the variables obtained for the female rural blacks.

(Table 1 about here)

Table 2 reveals the path coefficients and coefficients of determination for the urban respondents, while table 3 provides similar information for the rural respondents. Significant path coefficients are noted in both tables by an asterisk.[7] Table 2 indicates that considerably more variance was explained for the educational aspirations of the urban white respondents. For both the male and female urban white respondents, socioeconomic status was significantly related to significant other influence and educational aspirations. Significant other influence was found to have the strongest independent effect on aspirations

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[7] All path coefficients greater than twice the value of the standard error are considered statistically significant.

of all the predictor variables for the white respondents. The effect of SOI on aspirations was somewhat larger for the white females (B=.408) than males (B=.367).

(Table 2 about here)

For the black urban respondents somewhat different findings emerged (Table 2). For males only two significant independent effects were observed, while for females only one significant effect was obtained in the model. For black males, father's education (B=.249) was found to exert a significant effect upon significant other influence. That is, sons of fathers with higher educational achievements perceived more encouragement from parents, teachers and friends to enroll in college, than did sons of fathers with lower educational achievements. Significant other influence was also found to be significantly related to educational aspirations as reflected by the B - coefficient of .190. It should be noted that the relative magnitude of the effect of significant other influence on educational aspirations was considerably less for the urban black males when compared to the urban white respondents.

The only significant effect observed for the urban black females was for the direct effect of father's occupation on educational aspirations (B=.187). Interestingly enough, the independent effect of significant other influence on educational aspirations for the urban black females was found to be nonsignificant (B=.064).

Table 3 reveals the direct effects of the variables included in the model, along with appropriate coefficients of determination for the rural respondents. Once again, more variance was explained

for the educational aspirations of the white male and female respondents. The effects of the two socioeconomic status indicators on significant other influence varied by control categories. No significant effects were observed for both white and black female respondents, while only one of the two socioeconomic status indicators was found to be significantly related to significant other influence for the male respondents.

(Table 3 about here)

The independent effects of significant other influence on educational aspirations was found to be relatively moderate for all but the rural black males. For these respondents SOI manifested a weak nonsignificant beta (B=.099). For the rural black female respondents involved in this study, significant other influence was the only variable in the model found to be significantly related to aspirations (Table 3).

For the rural white respondents, the influence of father's education on aspirations was larger than the direct effect of SOI. Additionally, father's occupation manifested significant direct effects on aspirations for both the male and female white rural youth.

Summary of Findings

For the models analyzed in this paper, considerably more variance was explained for the educational aspirations of the white respondents. Additionally, significant other influence was found to be the most important determinate of educational aspirations for the male and female white urban respondents and although the strength of the relation-

ships were considerably smaller, SOI was the strongest predictor of aspirations for the urban black male and rural black female respondents. For the rural white respondents, father's education was the most important determinant of aspirations. For the remaining two control categories - urban black females and rural black males - SOI failed to exert a significant effect on aspirations.

Of the eight control categories, within five, at least one of socioeconomic status indicators was found to be significantly related to significant other influence. Table 4 is an attempt to graphically present a summary of the findings of this study in terms of the hypotheses presented earlier. These hypotheses form a basis for the causal model analyzed by control categories. Table 4 reveals that in only two control categories (urban white males and females) was complete support provided for the hypotheses and therefore the causal model analyzed. In one control category, two hypotheses were supported and partial support was found for the third (rural white males). It should be noted that for the black respondents there was no instance where complete acceptance of all three hypotheses was found. These findings indicate that the model developed and analyzed has more utility for white than black youth.

(Table 4 about here)

Discussion and Conclusions

This study has attempted to assess the role of socioeconomic status and significant other influence in determining the formation of educational aspirations of southern youth. The large amount of previous

theoretical and empirical research compiled in this area provided a basis for the construction and analysis of a four-variable causal model. Despite the fact that recent empirical investigations have given attention to the importance of interpersonal influence provided by significant others for the formation of adolescents' educational aspirations, no study has utilized a composite index of significant other influence in an attempt to evaluate the relative importance of this variable for determining the educational aspirations of black youth. This paper, utilizing such a composite index has found differential effects for the influence of socioeconomic status and significant other influence on educational aspirations.

The findings of this study have various theoretical and methodological implications. First, with regard to the occupational achievements of blacks in the United States, Duncan (1968: 19) has provided evidence which indicates that black families have "a lesser impact on" the occupational opportunities of sons. Most recently, in a study of 6500 youth from four deep-South states, Cosby and Picou(1972) found that the influence of socioeconomic status on occupational aspirations differed considerably by race. S.E.S. was a better predictor of white youths' occupational goals. The findings presented in this study indicate that socioeconomic status has more direct influence on the educational aspirations of white youth. Our findings, when viewed along with those of Duncan (1968) and Cosby and Picou (1972) suggest that perhaps the role of parental social status is not as important, either directly or indirectly operating through significant other influence, for influencing the career aspirations and achievement of black youth.

The fact that the predictor variables included in this study had considerably more explanatory power for white youth raises some questions concerning the structure of the large body of empirical research in this area and suggests possible avenues for future investigations. One basic assumption for the model analyzed in this study and those analyzed by other researchers is that class is linearly and positively related to high-level educational orientations. That is, class position influences the interpersonal encouragement received by adolescents to attend college and in turn both of these variables influence educational aspirations. This assumption may not hold true for black adolescents, given their unique social situation in contemporary society.

Educational achievement, it may be contended, is highly valued as a means for social mobility throughout all strata of the black community and because of this fact, interpersonal encouragement to attend college also exists with equal emphasis throughout all strata of the black community. The educational decision-making process of the black adolescent may therefore be based moreso on individual ability than social structural position or interpersonal relations. Herriott's (1963) theoretical distinction between "self-assessment relative to others" and "perceived significant other influence" appears applicable for our findings. Herriott (1963: 162) contends that "level of aspiration" is a function of both of these types of social influence. It may be that for black youth, level of educational aspiration is determined moreso by the "self-reflexive activity", i.e., "self-assessment relative to others" than interpersonal influence. Future research should explore the logic of this contention.

In summary, it should be noted that the model analyzed in this study omits many important variables which could be included with appropriate theoretical justifications. Attempts at developing more complex non-recursive models utilizing these data are currently underway (Carter, Picou, Curry and Tracy, 1972). The findings presented in this paper suggest that the educational aspiration process differs significantly for black and white southern youth. The social context of the formation of aspirations appears to differ for black youth and attempts at incorporating variables relevant to the social experience of contemporary black youth (e.g., Afro-American identity, etc.) should be made in future research in this area.

TABLE 1. ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS AMONG THE VARIABLES BY CONTROL CATEGORIES

CATEGORY		VARIABLES				CATEGORY
MALE URBAN WHITE (N=871)		X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	MALE URBAN BLACK (N=160)
Father's Occupation	(X1)	----	.455	.079*	.177	(X1) Father's Occupation
Father's Education	(X2)	.519	----	.233	.223	(X2) Father's Education
Significant Other Influence	(X3)	.232	.268	----	.229	(X3) Significant Other Influence
Educational Aspirations	(X4)	.316	.361	.449	----	(X4) Educational Aspirations
FEMALE URBAN WHITE (N=949)						FEMALE URBAN BLACK (N=197)
Father's Occupation	(X1)	----	.376	.154	.230	(X1) Father's Occupation
Father's Education	(X2)	.537	----	.141	.169	(X2) Father's Education
Significant Other Influence	(X3)	.247	.237	----	.102*	(X3) Significant Other Influence
Educational Aspirations	(X4)	.266	.306	.467	----	(X4) Educational Aspirations
MALE RURAL WHITE (N-337)						MALE RURAL BLACK (N=146)
Father's Occupation	(X1)	----	.194	.248	.154 *	(X1) Father's Occupation
Father's Education	(X2)	.436	----	-.026*	.042 *	(X2) Father's Education
Significant Other Influence	(X3)	.073*	.151	----	.130 *	(X3) Significant Other Influence
Educational Aspirations	(X4)	.359	.395	.253	----	(X4) Educational Aspirations
FEMALE RURAL WHITE (N=276)						FEMALE RURAL BLACK (N=202)
Father's Occupation	(X1)	----	.128*	.027*	.031	(X1) Father's Occupation
Father's Education	(X2)	.393	----	.130*	.113*	(X2) Father's Education
Significant Other Influence	(X3)	.111*	.008 *	----	.210	(X3) Significant Other Influence
Educational Aspirations	(X4)	.238	.289	.214	----	(X4) Educational Aspirations

* Non-Significant Correlation

TABLE 2. PATH COEFFICIENTS AND COEFFICIENTS OF DETERMINATION FOR CAUSAL RELATIONS FOR URBAN RESPONDENTS BY RACE AND SEX CONTROL CATEGORIES

Race-Sex Categories & Dependent Variables	Independent Variables X_1 Fath Occ	X_2 Fath Ed	X_3 SOI	Coefficient of Determination R_2
White Males				
SOI X_3	.127*	.201*	-----	.08340
Aspirations X_4	.130*	.195*	.367*	.27634
Black Males				
SOI X3	-.034	.249*	----	.05539
Aspirations X_4	.102	.133	.190*	.09119
White Females				
SOI X_3	.168*	.147*	----	.07625
Aspirations X_4	.075*	.169*	.408*	.26198
Black Females				
SOI X_3	.118	.097	----	.03186
Aspirations X_4	.187*	.090	.064	.06545

* Significant Path Coefficient

TABLE 3. PATH COEFFICIENTS AND COEFFICIENTS OF DETERMINATION FOR CAUSAL RELATIONS FOR RURAL RESPONDENTS BY RACE AND SEX CONTROL CATEGORIES

Race-Sex Categories & Dependent Variables	Independent Variables X_1 Path Occ	X_2 Path Ed	X_3 SOI	Coefficient of Determination R_2
White Males				
SOI X_3	.009	.147*	----	.02297
Aspirations X_4	.229*	.265*	.196*	.23652
Black Males				
SOI X_3	.263*	-.076	----	.06712
Aspirations X_4	.125	.020	.099	.03297
White Females				
SOI X_3	.127	-.042	----	.01380
Aspirations X_4	.122*	.239*	.198*	.14030
Black Females				
SOI X_3	.009	.129	----	.01712
Aspirations X_4	.015	.085	.198*	.05170

* Significant Path Coefficient

TABLE 4. ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF HYPOTHESES BY CONTROL CATEGORIES

Hypothesis	CONTROL CATEGORY							
	UWM	UWF	UBM	UBF	RWM	RWF	RBM	RBF
H_1	A	A	F	A	A	A	F	F
H_2	A	A	A*	F	A*	F	A*	F
H_3	A	A	A	F	A	A	F	A

A = Accept Hypothesis
F = Fail to accept Hypothesis
A* = Partial Support provided

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